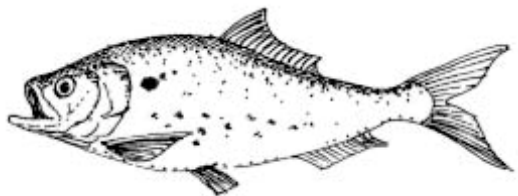


N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets



Menhaden **(*Brevoortia tyrannus*)**

Introduction

The menhaden is a member of the herring family but unlike shad they spawn in the ocean. They seldom exceed one pound and are extremely oily. They are referred to by other names such as pogey, bugmouth, and fatback. They are important member of the food web living in the estuary as young and moving into the ocean as adults to spawn.

What do they look like?

They are brown on top, silver below, and their fins are yellowish. They have a black spot behind their head. Menhaden have large mouths and have no teeth.

How big are they?

They grow to be 6-8 inches (15cm-20cm) long and can be as large as 18 inches (46cm).

Where do they live?

They live in schools that can contain 100,000 fish. Menhaden migrate north as the water warms and south as the water cools.

Who eats them?

They are eaten by tuna, bluefish, cod, sharks, whales, dolphins, squid, gulls, terns, ospreys and pelicans. A large crustacean parasite also feeds on the menhaden. It attaches to the fish's mouth; thus the nickname bugmouth.

What do they eat?

Menhaden feed on plankton, gills are used for filtering food. They can filter 6-7 gallons (23L-27L) a minute.

How do they mate?

Maturity occurs at about age 2 and spawning occurs from age 3-5. After the eggs are expelled they float and will hatch in about 75 days.

What are the young like?

The young migrate into the estuary to feed and grow. Between ages 1 and 2 they grow rapidly in size feeding on both phytoplankton and zooplankton there.

How long do they live?

They can live 10 years.

People Interactions

Menhaden are commercially fished. Many fishermen follow their migration to get their catch. Fish oil from the menhaden is used in cosmetics and other everyday products as well as an attractant in the sportsfishing industry. The scraps are used in commercial animal meal and agricultural fertilizer.

EstuaryLive

www.EstuaryLive.org

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

www.ncnerr.org or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

www.cerf.us

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